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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9588
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA PRIORITY 0047
RUEHLGB/AMEMBASSY KIGALI PRIORITY 0443
RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA PRIORITY 0562
RUEHLU/AMEMBASSY LUANDA PRIORITY 0198
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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (GARBLED TEXT)
E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/15/2029
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [CG](#) [BE](#)
SUBJECT: BELGIUM'S GOALS FOR THE AFRICAN GREAT LAKES REGION

Classified By: Acting DCM for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Ambassador Gutman hosted a luncheon October 8 with the Belgian MFA Africa team and the Chief of Staff to Belgium's Minister for Development Cooperation to discuss Belgium's priorities in the African Great Lakes region. Regarding the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Belgium believes the international community must first decide on and convey a united message to the GoDRC on political and development issues. Second, the international community must coordinate closely in Kinshasa, on the ground, and in their capitals. Third, the responsibility for leading expert groups on particular areas of action -- security sector reform (SSR), economic governance, etc. -- should be divided up among donor countries. Fourth, the expert groups should meet with the government of the DRC and gauge what the GoDRC is willing to commit; donors should then monitor and move forward with programs at a pace commensurate with Congolese commitment and engagement. The Belgians do not believe progress can be achieved in a short time frame they would like the Great Lakes Contact Group (GLCG) to agree on 2-3 year, five year, and ten year targets for political progress in the DRC. The GOB will measure the success of the October 14 GLCG meeting on whether the five goals above are agreed to by partners. Belgium believes that DRC President Kabila responds to international pressure when donor countries speak with one voice. The time to put pressure on the GoDRC is now, prior to the 2010 independence celebration and the 2011 elections. The MFA also expressed concerns about the upcoming elections in Burundi and about the Kagame regime in Rwanda. END SUMMARY.

Introduction

2. (C) The Ambassador hosted a lunch October 8 to discuss Belgium's priorities in Africa prior to the October 14 Great Lakes Contact Group (GLCG) meeting. The Belgian MFA recently re-evaluated its Africa policies and goals this summer after Yves Leterme replaced Karel De Gucht as Foreign Minister. The luncheon participants were: MFA Africa Director Renier Nijskens, FM Leterme's advisor on Africa Karl D'haene, Congo Desk Officer Hugues Chantry, Burundi and Rwanda Desk Officer Stephane Doppagne, the Chief of Staff to Development Minister Michel, Bruno Van Der Pluijm, and Embassy's Acting Deputy Chief of Mission, Political Officer and Political Section Intern.

A United International Community and Congolese Buy-In

¶3. (C) Belgium hopes to obtain partner country agreement on a united course of action on the DRC at the October 14 GLCG meeting. The GOB has become frustrated by the GoDRC's ability to play donors against each other, as well as the lack of any progress on a host of issues even though millions of Euros have been spent. Belgium believes a united, well coordinated international community can effectively pressure the GoDRC towards real progress on issues of concern. Belgium will try to obtain agreement on the following goals at the GLCG meeting:

-- a united message that is to be delivered by each donor country to the GoDRC.

-- agreement on a three-part coordination mechanism for the donor countries in Kinshasa, on the ground, and in capitals.

-- a division of leadership for areas of cooperation, establishing expert groups in each area (SSR, corruption, and economic governance, for example).

-- the need for these expert groups to meet with and obtain buy-in from the Congolese. The Belgians believe the GoDRC must be involved and committed to projects. Ideally, the international community might even focus on funding Congolese supported home-grown projects.

¶4. (C) Belgium is now convinced that only a unified international community putting pressure on the GoDRC will obtain the outcome donor countries are seeking. The GOB believes an incentive or "carrot and stick" approach can be used once Congolese buy-in and commitment is obtained. Rather than simply disbursing money regardless of Congolese behavior, donor countries should only move as fast as the Congolese, while guiding them in a desirable direction. In discussing who might have the lead on specific issues, the Belgians mentioned the EU Special Representative as the best candidate for leading the expert group on SSR. Belgium thinks that sexual violence and the problem of official impunity would be best addressed as part of SSR.

Kabila Responds to Pressure

¶5. (C) The Ambassador asked about the GoDRC's responsiveness to international pressure and Kabila's effectiveness. The MFA said Kabila has responded to international pressure when different countries delivered the same message. They also said he had the power at his disposal to solve problems when he makes up his mind to do so. Chantry said that Kabila, not his entourage, is truly in charge, and the question is one of political will. As an example, the Belgians mentioned a previous UN Security Council visit, when UN officials mentioned the problems of abuse within the Congolese military. Kabila became angry and took action against the offending officers. Belgium does not want to take the lead in delivering strong messages, but will discuss appropriate messaging with international partners. The Belgians think the international community has let the Kabila government off the hook too often. They think it is time to put pressure on him again, and Secretary Clinton's raising of sexual violence as an issue is just the kind of message that Kabila needs to hear.

Celebrations and Elections - Act Now

¶6. (C) The Belgians believe it is now time to put pressure on the Congolese. They think Kabila is currently obsessed with holding a successful celebration of fifty years of Congolese independence in 2010 and winning the presidential election in ¶2011. Delivering firm and targeted messages now would therefore have real impact. The MFA pointed out that Kabila could put off the election if the international community is too docile. They suggested a nightmare scenario in which Kabila might modify the constitution to extend his term from 5-7 years; postpone the 2011 election to 2013; get

international donors to fund his five priority areas for development without using any GoDRC resources; obtain debt relief from international financial institutions; use the Rwanda - DRC rapprochement as evidence that the security situation in the eastern DRC has improved; and then expel MONUC. He could then hold an election in 2013, claim he has set the country on the right path, and set himself up as president for life.

¶7. (C) Poloff asked if the Belgians had seen any sign that a constitutional change extending Kabila's term in office is plausible. Chantry responded that DRC Foreign Minister Thambwe was straightforward during his meeting with FM Leterme at UNGA in New York. Thambwe said, "we poor Congolese are obsessed with democracy and want to hold elections, but if you do not pay, we poor Congolese will be forced to change the constitution." After prodding by the ambassador, the Belgians said holding elections on time is important, no matter what Kabila's behavior might be, because parliamentary and local elections will be held at the same time. The GOB believes the parliament and local governments are the breeding grounds for future leaders and grass roots political development. They therefore encouraged the USG to remain strong in discussions with GoDRC leaders. They urged the USG to engage the GoDRC on the broad political situation and not limit discussions to sexual violence as a lone concern. Nijskens said that sexual violence is only a symptom of many problems in the DRC. The Ambassador asked whether an extension of the MONUC mandate is important, considering MONUC's shortcomings. The MFA said the violence in the East would only get worse if MONUC pulled out, and added that the MONUC presence allows for intelligence collection. It also supports an NGO presence on the ground that informs the world about the violence against women occurring there. Van der Pluijm suggested there are similar problems in the central and northern parts of the country which are not receiving publicity because of the lack of an international presence.

Long-Term Engagement

¶8. (C) The MFA cautioned against expecting quick results in the DRC, whether on sexual violence or other issues. Rather, Belgium believes the international community must remain committed for the long run and expect it to take at least fifteen years to obtain real transformation of the GoDRC's political mentality. Nijskens said he hoped the GLCG could agree on two to three year, five year, and 15 year targets for different issues affecting the DRC.
Rwanda, Burundi

¶9. (C) The Belgians briefly mentioned Rwanda and their concern that failure by the strong Kagame regime to address the underlying problems of the Tutsi-Hutu situation will lead to another ethnic catastrophe in the future. They were more positive, if still cautious, about Burundi. The GOB sees Burundi as a possible success story in Africa, especially if the elections next year go smoothly. Nevertheless, they stressed the need for the international community to remain vigilant and communicate its concerns to the Burundian government. The GOB's new aid program for Burundi includes incentives for a successful election, which they expect to sign during the President of Burundi's state visit to Belgium on October 22-23.

Comment

¶10. (C) The GOB clearly views the new Administration's interest in Africa positively. The MFA perceives that the United States is moving towards more active engagement in the Great Lakes region and is hopeful the U.S. government shares many of Belgium's concerns. The GOB wants to see an active international donor community that speaks with one voice and holds the DRC accountable on a wide range of issues from elections to security sector reform. However, Belgium is not likely to be as outspoken in its criticism of the GoDRC as it

was under FM Karl De Gucht, when bilateral relations soured after De Gucht's stinging criticism of the GoDRC in April 2008. Rather, Belgium will push for a strong, unified international community through the Great Lakes Contact Group. They hope and expect that the United States will back their efforts. The Belgians are ready and willing to work with us to improve the situation in the DRC in the short, medium, and long term.

GUTMAN

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